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A SHORT ACCOUNT

OF THE

Niohe Group.

BY

THOMAS DAVIDSON.

WITH ONE PLATE.

NEW YORK:

L. W. SCHMIDT, 24 BARCLAY STREET.

LONDON: ASHER & CO.

1875.

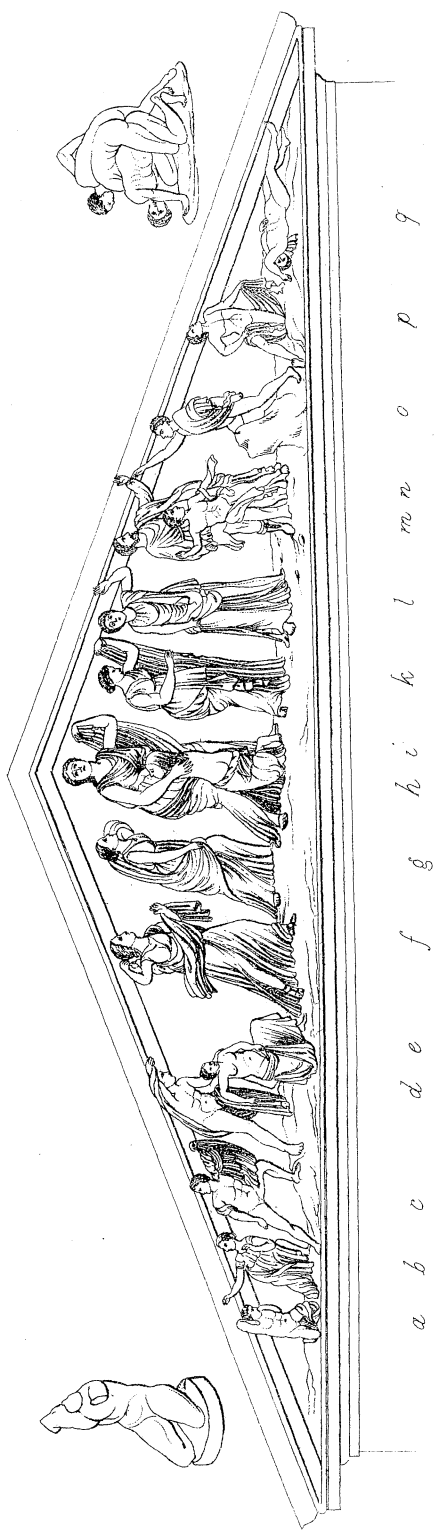


Photo. Galv. Relief Co.

A SHORT ACCOUNT
OF THE
NIOBE GROUP

BY
THOMAS DAVIDSON.

O Niobe, con che occhi dolenti
Vedeva io te segnata in su la strada
Fra sette e sette tuoi figliuoli spenti!
Dante, Purg. xii. 37-39.

NEW YORK:
L. W. SCHMIDT, 24 BARCLAY ST.
1875.

The Niobe Group.

INTRODUCTORY.

Of all the works of plastic art that have descended to us from antiquity, there is perhaps not one that is so difficult to treat as the Niobe Group. The following paper lays no claim to either exhaustiveness or originality; but, as there does not exist in English any comprehensive account of the Group, it may serve to increase the interest now beginning to be felt in many quarters for the great, earnest products of Greek art.

The writer has seen and examined casts, photographs, and many engravings of all that remains of the group. Of the antiques, he has seen only those in Munich, Berlin, London, and Paris. The chief authorities consulted by him are the following:

1. *Dr. K. B. Stark.* Niobe und die Niobiden in ihrer literarischen künstlerischen und mythologischen Bedeutung. Leipzig, 1863.
2. *Dr. K. B. Stark.* Nach dem griechischen Orient. Heidelberg, 1874.
3. *Dr. Carl Friedrichs.* Bausteine zur Geschichte der griechisch-römischen Plastik, oder Berlin's antike Bildwerke. Düsseldorf, 1868.
4. *Adolf Trendelenburg.* Niobe, Betrachtungen über das Schöne und Erhabene. Kleine Schriften. Leipzig, 1871.
5. *Joh. Overbeck.* Geschichte der griechischen Plastik für Künstler und Künstlerfreunde. Zweite Auflage. Leipzig, 1869.

The subject is treated under the following heads:

1. The Niobe Myth.
2. The Condition of Artistic Thought at the Time when the Original of the Niobe Group was produced.
3. The Niobe Group, its History and present Condition.
4. The Original Aspect and Purpose of the Group.
5. Motives of the Group and Description of the separate Statues.

I. THE NIOBE MYTH.

The first mention made of Niobe in Greek literature occurs in the twenty-fourth book of the *Iliad*, lines 602-617. Achilles, addressing Priamos, who has come to beg the body of the slain Hectôr, says :

“Behold, thy son is ransomed, aged man,
 As thou hast begged, and lies in state. At rise
 Of Morn thou shalt behold and bear him hence.
 But now let us bethink ourselves to sup;
 For even the fair-haired Niobe bethought
 Herself of food, though children twelve lay dead
 Within her halls, six daughters and six sons
 In youthful prime. The sons Apollo slew
 With arrows from his silver bow, incensed
 At Niobe; the daughters, Artemis
 The archer-queen, because she made herself
 The peer of Lêtô of the beauteous cheeks,
 Whom she reproached as mother of but twain,
 While she herself had given to many birth.
 But they, though only two, slew all of hers.
 And these for nine days’ space lay stretched in blood,
 And there was none to give them burial,
 For Kronos’ son had made the people stones.
 But on the tenth the gods Uranian
 Interred them. Yet did Niobe bethink
 Herself of food, though worn with waste of tears.
 And now among the rocks and lonely hills
 Of Sipylos, where lie, tradition says,
 The resting-places of the goddess nymphs
 That lightly tript on Achelôös’ banks,
 Although a stone, she broods upon the woes
 Inflicted by the gods.”

This, as far as the consciousness of the Greeks was concerned, is the kernel of the story, which it would be easy enough to connect with dawn-myths, as is the custom at present, or with a mystic philosophy, as was the custom half a century ago. We shall do neither, but shall give the myth in its fully developed form, as it was known to the tragedians Æschylos and Sophoklēs, who made it the theme of tragedies in the century before the date of the Niobe Group.

In the burg or castle of her father Tantalos, situated on a bend of Mt. Sipylos, a little to the north of Smyrna in Lydia, Niobe was born. Already her father had given evidence of that *ὕβρις*, or insolence, which characterized and destroyed himself and all his race. The youthful Niobe, however, seems to have led as innocent and idyllic a life as her hardly more fortunate counterpart, the Krimhild of the *Nibelungenlied*. Sappho tells us that "Lêtô and Niobe were very loving companions," and a picture at Herculaneum represents the two playing together. More fortunate had it been for Niobe had she not been so intimate with the divine Lêtô. In this, as in many other cases, familiarity bred contempt, albeit Lêtô was a goddess.

When Niobe grew up to womanhood, she was wooed and won by Amphion, son of Zeus and Antiope, twin-brother of Zêtheus, and king of Thebes in Bœotia, the same who, by the music of his lyre, induced the stones to come and build themselves into walls around his powerful capital. Thus Niobe, herself the grand-daughter of the father of the gods, married a son of Zeus, a man in every way worthy of her. In her married life, she met with everything that could make her happy and develop in her that insolence, or forgetfulness of her human limitations, which the Greeks believed to be the inseparable nemesis of incessant good fortune. Besides the high birth, the personal beauty, and the unbounded wealth, which she had inherited, she had now sovereign power, a husband whom she adored, and, what appealed more than all else to her womanly nature, a family of blooming children, each fit to have been the direct offspring of a divinity. The number of

these children is variously given by different poets. Homer, as we have seen, gives her six sons and six daughters, and that was probably the uniform number in the yet older forms of the myth. Hesiod apparently gave her ten sons and ten daughters, and in this he was followed by Mimnermos, Pindar, and Bacchylidês. Sappho gave her nine sons and nine daughters, while Alkman reduced the number to five sons and five daughters. The number most generally assigned to her, however, and the number assumed by the tragedians who may be supposed to have specially influenced the artist of the Niobe Group, was seven sons and seven daughters. There are special reasons connected with the worship of Apollo for fixing upon the double of seven, rather than the double of six, as the number of Niobe's children.

When the worship of Apollo and Artemis, the divine offspring of her old divine playmate Lêtô, or rather, when the worship of Lêtô herself, was introduced into Thebes, and when the Theban women, warned by Mantô the daughter of Teiresias the prophet, went in procession to the altar of the goddess, to perform the rightful acts of sacrifice and worship, the beautiful and haughty queen drove after them in her chariot, and with indignation commanded them to desist and leave the altars of Lêtô, reminding them that she, their visible queen, the daughter of Tantalos, the grand-daughter of Atlas and of Zeus himself—she, the wife of Amphion—she, the possessor of uncounted wealth—she, the divinely fair—she, the mother of seven sons and seven daughters,—far better deserved their worship than Lêtô, whose only recommendation was that she was the mother of two children, and whom the earth had almost refused a spot to give these birth in. With such haughty language, she drove the Theban women from the altars of Lêtô. The latter, indignant at the insult done to her divinity, laid her complaint before her two children, Apollo and Artemis, and entreated them to take vengeance for her. Her entreaties met with a ready response, and the god of the silver bow and the archer-queen, descending, slew in one day, the former all the sons of Niobe, the latter all the daughters, and left their mother childless. In the bereaved Niobe, the heavenly descended

queen and the human mother now struggle for mastery. Unrelenting to the last, and disdaining to utter a complaint or an entreaty or to shed a tear, she, nevertheless, suffers such pain, that Zeus, seeing it to have reached the limit beyond which the human cannot pass, is himself moved to pity, turns her into stone, and, in a whirlwind, carries her off back to her native Sipylos, the scene of her innocent youth, where, say the poets, she still sits in stone and weeps.

It will be observed that in many, though in no very essential points, this form of the myth differs from that given in Homer. In Homer, for example, Zeus turns the people of the country into stone, so that they cannot bury the dead: in the developed myth, he turns Niobe herself into stone, which weeps and shows more feeling than she.

In its oldest, Homeric form, the myth of Niobe has already almost forgotten its origin in natural phenomena and passed into the moral sphere. But even here it still bears some traces of its origin, and these are even more numerous and more distinctly pronounced in later poetry. Even were we not aided by the etymology of the word *Niobe*, which undoubtedly means *snow*, or *snow-cloud*, or *snow-goddess*, we should hardly find any difficulty in tracing the myth to its origin. (See Max Müller, *Zeitschrift für vergl. Sprachforschung*, vol. xix., pp. 42-3.) Niobe is the snow-cloud which covers and conceals the lofty mountain peak, and whose offspring are the lower snowy summits. Niobe aspires to be the equal of the skyey powers, and seems for a time to be all-prevailing. But the spring-time comes, and the warm sun smites and destroys the children of Niobe, which disappear under the teeming earth. The snow-cloud is wafted by the swift, warm wind of Zeus from the towering peak, which now stands out bare and rocky, and seems to weep the rivulets that flow down to water the vales below.

How conscious the poets of the best days of Greece were of the natural origin of the myth may be seen from a passage in Sophoklês (*Antigonê*, lines 823 sqq.), in which the fearless daughter of Œdipous, doomed to be buried alive, compares herself to Niobe, in words which baffle all translation:

“Yea, I have heard speak of the Phrygian
Stranger, Tantalos’ child, and her
Dismal death upon Sipylos’ height.

Like stubborn ivy, about her grew up
 Strong stone; and, as she melts in tears,—
 Such is the legend,—
 Tempestuous rains and snows never forsake her,
 But bathe the breast of her 'neath brows all tears."

The myth appears in various places both in Greece proper and in Asia Minor, and almost wherever there are lofty, cloud-compelling mountain-peaks. It was finally located on Mount Sipylus, in the neighborhood of Smyrna. When this took place, it is impossible to say; but there can hardly be any doubt that the passage in Homer which records the location is a late interpolation. As we have seen, the connection with Sipylus must have been familiar before the time of Sophoklês. Anakreôn, or whoever wrote the odes attributed to him, tells us that "the daughter of Tantalos once stood a stone on the Phrygian hills," and there are other allusions of a similar kind. The cause which led to the bringing of Niobe into connection with Mount Sipylus we can perhaps trace out.

Pausanias, speaking of the theatre of Dionysos at Athens, says of a cave connected with it, "There are in it an Apollo and an Artemis destroying the children of Niobe. This Niobe I myself saw when I ascended Mount Sipylus. When closely approached, it seems merely a mass of unhewn stone, without any resemblance at all to a woman, weeping or otherwise; whereas, if viewed from a distance, it strikes one at once as representing a woman weeping and bowed down." From this and other allusions it is quite plain that the ancients were acquainted with a rude statue, hewn in high relief out of the rocky side of Mount Sipylus, and representing a woman sitting bowed down in the attitude of weeping. This statue, which was originally perhaps intended to represent Kybelê, the mother of the gods, was — not improbably at the time of the Ionian migration — mistaken for Niobe. The Niobe-myth was ever afterwards connected with Mount Sipylus.

The statue in question has been re-discovered in modern times, and still corresponds accurately to the description given of it by Pausanias. It is hewn out of the solid rock, and is about four times life-size. The face of the rock has been made even to the height of about fifty feet. In this

even surface has been sunk an arched niche of about thirty-five feet in height, and therein is hewn the figure of Niobe. At a short distance the motive of the relief can easily be made out. From a small cleft in the almost perpendicular rocks above there runs a stream of water, which, trickling down over the statue, makes it seem to weep. Thus, what is perhaps the oldest existing monument of Greek art represents the unhappy Niobe weeping for her children.

II. THE CONDITION OF ARTISTIC THOUGHT AT THE TIME WHEN THE ORIGINAL OF THE NIOBE GROUP WAS PRODUCED.

In the thirty-sixth book of his *Natural History*, Pliny, speaking of the doubts entertained concerning the authorship of a statue of Janus, tells us that there was a similar uncertainty as to whether Skopas or Praxitelês sculptured the group of the dying children of Niobe in the temple of Apollo Sosianus. Here he unquestionably refers to our group. Authors less cautious than Pliny unhesitatingly attributed it to Praxitelês. There is an epigram in the Greek Anthology, which says, speaking in the person of Niobe (iv. 181, 298):

“From life to stone the gods transformed me once;
From stone to life Praxitelês recalled.”

In the same spirit one of Ausonius's epigrams (28):

“I lived, I turned to stone, which, carved by
Praxitelês, rewoke as Niobe.
The artist's hands restored me all save sense,
And that I had not when I spurned the gods.”

Whichever of the great artists, Skopas or Praxitelês, was the author of the Niobe Group—and the views of modern critics are largely divided upon the point—there can be no reasonable doubt that it was the work of either the one or the other, and therefore there can be no difficulty in assigning the period at which it was produced. Skopas was born in the island of Paros about the year 420 B.C., and Praxitelês at Athens about 392. This would place the period of the artistic activity of the former between 390 and 340, that of the latter between 370 and 320, allowing a slight margin for uncertainty of reckoning. Speaking roughly then, their artistic lives, taken together, extended from the termination of the Peloponnesian war and the humiliation of Athens to

the establishment of the Macedonian monarchy of Alexander.

It is barely possible to give an adequate account of the events and aspects of this stormy period; still less to bring into view the changes of thought and conviction to which it gave birth. They are found reflected not only in the historical writings of the time, but also in the philosophy, the religion, and the art of it. We can trace them not only in Thukydidês and Xenophôn, but also in Plato and Aristotle, in the later tragedy and comedy, and perhaps, more than all, in the sculpture and the painting. The Peloponnesian war, of whose importance its historian Thukydidês was well aware, not only broke the political and financial power of the Greek States, making them an easy prey to the first bold adventurer who might choose to attack them, but it likewise wrought a complete change in the views and convictions of the Greeks themselves, and especially of the Athenians, who had been most grievously affected by it. The change had indeed been preparing even before that—from the very rise of Athenian democracy; but it did not find its full expression till after the fall of Athens. Then the Athenians, in their hour of adversity, were brought face to face with their own principles in their results, and all their past suddenly came up in their consciousness in bold relief against their present. From that hour, the naïveté, the unconscious genius of the Athenians is gone. All that they do henceforth is conscious. Their poets and artists are now philosophers. Some reject altogether the principles of democracy, because they have been found, in a great crisis, to lead to ruin: others hold on to them, thinking that their end is not yet, and that after night will come the dawn. Plato, in despair of finding any form of government that will be satisfactory, invents an Utopia, in which philosophers are to be the kings, and lays the basis of Greek Romanticism. Aristotle, in whom, more than in any other man, all that Greece represented became conscious and found adequate expression, tries to find the rational in that which has been, and thereupon to rear an edifice for the future, thus placing himself in direct opposition to Romanticism. In the midst of all these divisions and antitheses, this utter break-

ing down of the old political consciousness of the Greeks, there arose, more and more, the consciousness of individuality, a consciousness which especially affected Athens, and, among the forms of her activity, her art in particular. Art now retired from public into private life, and represented individuals instead of types, particular affections and states of the soul instead of the divine calm of unruffled self-command. Athens, no longer rich and powerful, was unable as a state to patronize art, as she had done in the days of Pheidias, so that art was now obliged either to emigrate or to look about for support from private enterprise. It thus ceased to represent the ideals of a great people, or the types of national divinities, and followed the subjective taste of the artist or the wealthy purchaser. Artists began to sculpture and expose their works for sale.

All these changes place an immense gulf between the sculpture of the days of Periklês and that of the time of which we are speaking. This appears both in the choice of subject and in the manner of treating it. The subjects are no longer religious as of yore, but mythological. No longer statues of Zeus and Hêra enthroned in divine repose, whose power needed no exhibition to render it visible, but representations of divinities holding relations with human beings, performing some special action, or influenced by some desire or passion. Thus, while the older Pheidian art had aimed at producing forms of matchless beauty, and cared little about expression, as far at least as the passions and feelings were concerned, the later art of Skopas and Praxitelês did its best to combine the expression of feeling with beauty of form. We might say that, while the art of Pheidias and his time expresses character in repose, that of Skopas and Praxitelês represents feeling in action. The former strives to express an essence, the latter an action. There is all this distinction between the divine calm of the Zeus of Pheidias and the immortal pain of Niobe.

In a certain sense, the art of the later period, to which the Niobe belongs, is superior to the art of Pheidias, as well as to all subsequent Greek art. Taken all in all, it is perhaps the most perfect of all art. It holds the golden mean between two extremes. While it neither reaches the typical forms of

beauty realized by Pheidias, nor expresses the extremes of feeling, such as we find in the contortions of Laokoôn, it combines expression of feeling with perfection of form in a manner which has never again been imitated. From this time onward, Greek art, in its attempt to express feeling, or to appeal to low desires, departs more and more from the principle of beauty, its true life and essence.

There was another circumstance which contributed very greatly to place a distinction between the national Athenian art of Pheidias and the art of the following century, and that was the development of tragic poetry, which reached its height under Periklês, but did not affect plastic art until later. While Pheidias had drawn his ideals of the gods from the Homeric epics, the later sculptors drew theirs from the tragedies of Æschylos, Sophoklês, and Euripidês. Sophoklês, the longest-lived of these poets, died in B.C. 406, and Skopas, as we have seen, was born 14 years before, and Praxitelês 14 years after, that date. In the hands of these artists, sculpture ceased to be epic and became tragic, so much so, that most of their works, and the Niobe Group among the rest, are based upon particular tragedies, having particular plots and motives. This accounts for the prevalence of groups in this period, and leads us to conclude that, whatever is true in regard to the principles, motives, and underlying thought of Greek tragedy in its best days, is true, as far as the nature of sculpture will admit, of the tragic sculpture of Skopas and Praxitelês. Aristotle, who was the somewhat younger contemporary of these artists, and who may very well have seen the original of the Niobe Group, gives, in his own terse way, a definition of tragedy which will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, equally well to the *sculpture* of the period of which we are speaking. When we omit all that refers to the language of tragedy, that definition runs as follows:

“Tragedy is an ideal representation of an earnest fact in the world of action, a fact complete in itself, and accomplishes through pity and fear the purgation of these emotions.”

This is no mere whimsical, subjective definition of what tragedy ought to be; it is an inductive definition of what the tragedy of Greece had been, and, consciously or unconsciously,

ly, it was the creative principle of the plastic art of the century following. "Pity and fear," says the definition. What else are these but the elements of the sublime? And is not the art of Skopas and Praxitelês the art of the sublime, in contra-distinction to the art of Pheidias, which is that of the divinely beautiful?

This distinction may be made a little more apparent. Go out on a windless morning in June and stand on a rocky shore, just after sunrise, when the mist is lifting from the blue, unruffled water, and you will have before you one of the most purely beautiful sights that the physical world has to present. If your mind is not out of tune, you can stand there an hour, and gaze, in satisfied, dreamy repose, feeling the "rapture of the lonely shore." When you turn away, you will say to yourself that you have been unutterably blest, and that this world is passing fair. You will be inclined, moreover, to rest and dream for the rest of that day.

If, on the other hand, you will visit the same spot on a morning in September, when the equinoctial winds are high, stand there, while the morning air freshens into a breeze, and the breeze into a gale, and the gale into a storm; watch how the slight ripples swell into waves, the waves into billows and the billows into surges, and how these writhe and struggle and fling themselves in their fury against the rocks at your feet; and fill your whole soul with the grandeur of the spectacle—you will have no inclination to turn away until it is over. If you wait until the wind subsides, you will see the surges gradually decrease in size and force, until they become first billows, then waves, and then again ripples. Nature has again resumed the quiet tenor of her way, and you have been with the sublime. If, in turning away, you cast a last look at the ripples, they will mean more to you than they did when you first looked at them. Though merely beautiful now, they will suggest to you all the terrific grandeur of the storm, and you will have in one thought the terrible and the beautiful. This constitutes the sublime in Nature. It is not, however, the highest form of the sublime. There is yet wanting a powerful element, which is found only in the world of Spirit.

If now, instead of going to the ocean's brim to look, you

turn your eye to the ocean of Spirit, as manifested in human existence, you will, perchance, be able to discover this higher form. It is not necessary to find in human life a particular counterpart to the waveless sea of the June morning. We all know lives that "glide on like a summer's dream," and how beautiful they are. When we are weary and worn in our toils, or baffled and disappointed in our purposes, our thoughts turn to such lives, and dwell upon them with lingering fondness. They are not great lives, we know, and in our hours of vigor we should not envy them; but, after all, they are beautiful, and we love them. They have been drawn, over and over again, by artists and poets who could do all but the highest. That highest was reserved for the grand old masters,

"Whose mighty thoughts suggest
Life's endless toil and endeavor."

And that highest is the sublime in life, or, otherwise, the tragic, whose elements are not alone beauty and fear, but beauty, fear, and pity. While the sublime in the pitiless world of nature is made up of two elements, the sublime in the spiritual world has three. Spirit alone calls forth pity.

Let us look at the ocean of Spirit as it lies mirrored in the tragic myths of the Greeks—in that of Niobe, for example, which will illustrate our meaning better, perhaps, than any other. In the young Niobe, as she plays, on the hills of Lydia, with the divine Lêtô, you have the beautiful, calm ocean of the June morning—a picture as idyllic as the life of Adam and Eve in paradise. You can dwell upon it for hours with ever new satisfaction. A landscape painter would delight to paint it. Watch Niobe as she grows up, and you will see the breath of ambition (the Greeks called it *ὑβρις*, or insolence,) which is in the blood of the children of Tantalos, gradually freshening into a wind, the wind into a gale, the gale into a storm, forcing her at last to dash herself against the immovable rocks of divine purpose, upon which not only she, but all the lives that she has borne upon her bosom, are broken and tossed like spray. After the storm, the calm. Niobe is restored to the scenes of her innocent youth—the mountains of Lydia. She is calmer now than even in the days of her childhood. She is beyond ambition and insolence. The di-

vine purpose, which she has called into active manifestation, pursues the even, unobtrusive tenor of its way, and all is quiet again. Niobe is not only beautiful now; she is sublime. Quiet and stony as she is, she is more eloquent than ever in life. Her calm suggests to you the storm of insolence breaking against the divine order of things, and in the two-fold thought you have the sublime of the world of Spirit—the sublime made up of the three elements of beauty, fear, and pity. This was the sublime that the great tragedians of the fifth century B.C., and the great sculptors of the fourth, tried to portray: this is the underlying thought that shaped the group of the all-suffering Niobe.

III. THE NIOBE GROUP, ITS HISTORY AND PRESENT CONDITION.

Pliny, as we have seen, tells us that the Niobe Group stood in his time—that is, in the second half of the first century of our era—in the temple of Apollo Sosianus in Rome. This temple appears to have been built by Gaius Sosius, who, in B.C. 38, was appointed by Mark Antony governor of Syria and Kilikia. This is the Sosius who placed Herod on the throne of Judæa, who triumphed in B.C. 34, who was consul in 32, and who commanded the left wing of Antony's fleet at the battle of Actium. Like most of the powerful Romans of his time, he had three very marked characteristics—a taste for art, a desire to perpetuate his memory, and much unscrupulousness. Under the influence of these, he appears, after his triumph, to have erected, outside of the Porta Carmentalis, a temple, called by his own name, to Apollo, and to have adorned it with works of Grecian art appropriated by him when he was governor of Syria and Kilikia. Among these works was the Niobe Group, and in this temple it remained for a century at least.

From what place in the East Sosius brought it, is not easy to determine. Some think that it came from Seleukia in Syria, and that it adorned a temple of Apollo there. Be this as it may, it was at Rome in the first century of our era. What became of it subsequently it is impossible to say. Certain it is that in some one of the disasters which befel the city of Rome in the early centuries of our era, it was destroyed, or, at least, lost sight of, and has never since been

recovered. In the year 1583, however, there was found, on the Via Labicana, near the church of San Giovanni Laterano in Rome, the greater part of a copy of it; and this is what is now known to us as the Niobe Group. It was purchased by the Grand-duke of Tuscany for something like 1500 scudi, and set up in the Villa Medici. Thence it was removed to Florence in the year 1775, and underwent restoration. A special apartment was built for it in the Uffizi, in which it was finally set up, each statue on a separate pedestal, in 1794.

The copy was for a long time considered to be the original; but opposed to this belief are many facts of great weight. First, there is a great difference of workmanship in the different statues, showing that they are not all from one hand; second, the statues are not all of one kind of marble, as those of the original group must undoubtedly have been; and, third, there are in existence more than one copy of several of them, e.g. of F, M, O, and Q. Whether these grounds might not be partially invalidated, and a part at least of the group vindicated as original, might be doubtful. Certain, however, it is that critics are now all but unanimous in the conviction that we possess only an imperfect copy.

The group, when found in 1583, consisted of thirteen figures, viz.: Niobe herself and her youngest daughter, H, I; four other daughters, B, F, G, and K (upon the authenticity of the last of which much doubt has been expressed); six sons, C, D, N, O, P, Q, and the pædagogos, M. If we allow Niobe seven sons and seven daughters, these with herself and the pædagogos would bring the number of figures up to sixteen. It is not improbable that the family nurse was present, forming a counterpart to the pædagogos. Supposing, however, we estimate the original number at sixteen, we still lack four figures, viz., one son and three daughters. Various attempts have been made in recent times to fill the gaps in the group by the insertion of other statues found elsewhere. The success of several of these attempts leaves no room for doubt. There is in the Vatican a duplicate of the son marked D, and before him, and forming a group with him, a youthful sister, whom he is in the act of trying to support with his left hand, and to shield with the mantle in his right. That this daughter originally belonged to

the group there can be no reasonable doubt. Thorwaldsen, again, placed in it a kneeling figure, A, at present in Florence, and formerly believed to be a Narkissos; and all critics are agreed that he was justified in so doing. If we add these to the thirteen originally found, we shall raise the number of the figures to fifteen, and there will remain only one daughter to be accounted for. Shortly after the discovery of the Niobe Group, there was added to it a statue of uncertain origin, L, which has ever since remained in it, though with what right is very doubtful. If this statue were admitted, we should have something like a copy of the entire group.

Several archæologists have tried to add other figures besides those mentioned, but their suggestions have not met with general acceptance. Perhaps the strongest efforts have been made in favor of the so-called Illioneus (R) in the *Glyptothek* at Munich, and the wrestler-group (S) in Florence. In favor of the latter is the fact that it was found along with the group in 1583. I have already remarked that one of the figures found at that time is considered by more than one competent critic as not belonging to the group. This is the female figure marked K. It is rejected by Overbeck, but admitted by Stark. Admitting it provisionally, in default of anything more evidently suitable, we have, with some degree of probability, copies more or less perfect of all the sixteen figures of which the group was originally composed. At all events we have enough to enable us to determine, with some measure of likelihood, how the whole originally looked, for what purpose it was intended, and where and how it stood.

IV. THE ORIGINAL ASPECT AND PURPOSE OF THE GROUP.

Pliny, as we have seen, tells us that the Niobe Group stood, in his time, in the temple of Apollo Sosianus at Rome. The expression "in the temple" is very vague, and gives us no information as to how or whereabouts the group was placed. It merely tells that it was not in the *τέμενος* or open space in front of the temple; but whether it adorned the interior of the cella, and, if so, how it was arranged, or whether it occupied some other position in the temple, we are left to guess. The matter, however, is one of very small importance, inas-

much as, even if we knew how the figures stood in Rome, we should still be in doubt whether their position there corresponded with their original one. We are, therefore, left entirely, in our attempts to determine the purpose and original arrangement of the group, to considerations derived from the group itself, and a comparison of it with other groups whose original position we know with certainty.

The conjectures and theories which have been hazarded respecting the original position and arrangement of the Niobe Group may be reduced to four.

1°. It has been supposed to have stood, like at least one other group, about whose position we are sufficiently well informed—the work of Lykios, representing the last combat of Achilles with Memnōn—in a semicircle in the court-yard of a temple; but this is rendered extremely unlikely by the fact that the different figures are carefully finished only on one side, and could, therefore, hardly have been placed where they could be seen from all sides.

2°. The figures have been supposed to have stood on separate pedestals in the cella of a temple, pretty much as they now stand in the gallery at Florence; but this is rendered more than improbable by the well known fact that no statues were admitted into a Greek temple except those directly connected with the worship of the particular god; and this the Niobe Group certainly could not have been.

3°. They have been supposed to have occupied separate niches about the temple, or to have stood in the intercolumnal spaces on the outside; but this is, to say the least, rendered in a high degree improbable by the evident unity of the group, which would lose very much of its grandeur and tragic purpose, if not seen as a whole.

The inadequacy of these three hypotheses has forced a large number of archæologists to the adoption of a fourth, which, while it has a certain degree of antecedent probability, is supported by many very strong grounds of analogy, as well as by some cogent reasons drawn from the configuration of the group itself. The objections thus far urged against it are not so cogent as they at first sight appear. This theory, which was originally propounded by the English architect Cockerell, was afterwards worked out in detail

and based upon independent grounds by the German archæologist Welcker.

4°. In all Greek temples, between the frieze surmounting the columns in front and the cornice of the two ends of the slanting roof there was a space in the form of a very flat isocetes triangle, called by the Greeks *ἀετός*, *ἀέτωμα*, *τύμπανον*, *δέλτα*; by the Latins, *fastigium*; and by ourselves, *the pediment*. This pediment, unavoidable from the principles of Greek architecture, was originally a very intractable thing, and it took the genius of the Greeks to utilize it, and make it, instead of being a blemish, a basis for the very highest forms of decoration. Such decoration they understood how to bring into harmony with the rest of the building, and in this way contributed very much to the advancement of both architecture and sculpture. It was customary to place in the pediment a group representing some great action of the god to whose worship the temple was dedicated. But the space was of triangular form, and, consequently, only groups having more or less pyramidal contour could be put into it. The principal figure would, of course, have to be in the middle, under the ridge of the roof, and the others would have to be arranged on both sides, on a scale of decreasing vertical dimension toward the eaves. That a group representing the destruction of the children of Niobe would be admirably suited for such a position, both as regards subject and possible composition, is sufficiently obvious. For a temple dedicated to Apollo and Artemis in common, it would, indeed, be almost the only one available, inasmuch as this is almost the only great occasion on which they are mentioned as having acted in concert. It would likewise be admirably suited for a temple of Lêtô; and even for a temple of Apollo alone, it would not be without its fitness. Nothing else could better express the nature, extent, and righteousness of his power. In view of these considerations, it has been conjectured, with a fair amount of probability, that the Niobe Group was originally intended to occupy the pediment of a temple of Apollo.

The question then comes to be: Does the group itself, its number and proportions, give any countenance to this view? In other words, if we place Niobe in the middle, can we

arrange the other members of the group in such a way that the whole could be made to fit into the pediment of a Greek temple? If we assume that the figures we now have stand in very much the same proportion to each other as those of the original group did, we shall have no difficulty in seeing that they might be made to fit into a triangular space. Whether, however, they would fit into a triangular space of the proportions of the pediment of any known or possible Greek temple is another question, and one that must be answered in the negative. This has been proved by actual measurement. Herein lies the main objection to the theory. Other objections are that the figures are too slender, too little massive, to have been intended to be viewed from a distance, and that the angle at which the front side of the base of the statue of the fallen Niobid, Q, is hewn away, shows that it must have been placed but a very little above the eye of the spectator, if it was to afford the best view. Now, these objections, one and all, owe their validity to the one assumption that the figures which we have and consider as belonging to the group, stand to each other in the same proportion as those of the original group did. But this is purely an assumption, nothing more, and there are several things that militate strongly against it. In the first place, in cases where there are several copies of the same figure, these are not by any means always of the same size. For example, the Florentine copy of the fallen Niobid is about 6 ft. 2 in. long, the Munich copy 5 ft. 6 in., and the Dresden copy 6 ft. 6 in.; and this is not the only case. This renders it quite plain that any inference drawn from the relative dimensions of the figures known to us has very little cogency. Besides this, there is another very important fact that must be taken into consideration.

It has already been remarked that the sculptured groups of the fourth century B.C. drew their subjects directly from the tragic poetry of the previous century, and indeed, generally, from particular tragedies. Now, we know that both Æschylos and Sophoklēs wrote tragedies on the myth of Niobe. Both these tragedies are lost, with the exception of a few fragments. From what remains of that of Sophoklēs, we glean that he represented the destruction of Niobe's chil-

dren as taking place in the royal palace at Thebes. If, on the other hand, we consult the later mythographers, who drew their material very largely from the tragedians, we shall find them pretty unanimous in placing the scene of the catastrophe in a mountainous region, on a rocky ground. This is notably true of Ovid, whose narrative of the event, in the sixth book of the *Metamorphoses*, may have been written in view of the very group we are treating. Under these circumstances, we should be almost justified in assuming that the sculptor of the Niobe Group based his work upon a tragedy which placed the scene of the terrible catastrophe upon a mountainous or rocky platform. This assumption becomes almost a certainty when we examine attentively the bases of the different statues. These represent rocky surfaces. It is quite plain that several of the sons are running over rocks and trying to ascend. This is especially evident in the cases of the figures marked C and O. If, then, we suppose Niobe to have been placed on the summit of a rocky eminence, and imagine that her children, in their terror, are attempting to run to her (and all this is in a high degree probable), we shall perhaps be able to group the figures in such a way as to bring them, with great effect, within a pediment of Grecian proportions.

The objection to the theory derived from the want of massiveness in the figures is more apparent than real. It is true, they are not so massive as the Elgin Marbles, nor so thick-set as the Æginetan Group in Munich; at the same time they are not slender enough to unfit them for a position in a pediment of considerable height, even if we suppose the original figures to have been no larger than the extant copies. The objection advanced in connection with the fallen Niobid does not apply to the best copy, viz., the one in Munich, as I know from personal examination. The best view of that exquisite figure is obtained from below, when the line of vision forms an angle of about 45° with the upper surface of the base.*

It would be unwise to dogmatize concerning the original position of the Niobe Group. At the same time, it must be

* Cf. Heinrich Brunn, *Beschreibung der Glyptothek Ludwig's I. zu München*, 2te. Aufl. p. 170.

admitted that the pediment-theory of Cockerell and Welcker is still the most probable one, and therefore, until some more specious theory is proposed, we shall be justified in adhering to it. Three points, at least, may be regarded as absolutely certain: 1°. that the figures formed an undivided group placed upon an uneven, rocky base; 2°. that this group was intended to be looked at from below; and, 3°. that it was intended to be seen from one side only. Assuming then, provisionally, that the Niobe Group was intended to occupy the pediment of a temple, and that it consisted of the sixteen figures represented in the accompanying cut, we may pass to

V. MOTIVES OF THE GROUP AND DESCRIPTION OF THE SEPARATE STATUES.

One may suppose himself approaching a great, earnest temple of Apollo, built in the Doric style, with its plain columns and general soberness of adornment. When the general aspect of the edifice has produced its awesome and solemnizing effect upon him, he lifts his eyes to the pediment and beholds the power of the pure and purifying god manifested in visible form. He is in the presence of the awe-inspiring Niobe Group, in which is revealed the divine moral order of the Universe working its discordant elements into sublime harmony. He sees no image of Apollo or of Artemis. It is their power, not themselves, that is here manifested. Any attempt to represent "the power in darkness whom we guess" would have detracted much from the sublimity of the conception. That which we see is very much less awful than that which is hidden from us. It is true that some critics have tried to place the Apollo of Belvedere in the group; but such an attempt must be regarded as involving a misconception. Where, indeed, could we imagine him to have stood? Even if we could locate him, he could hardly be represented otherwise than as bending his bow, which would be a very prosy conception, compared with the leaving of him invisible. We may thus take it for granted that the divinities Apollo and Artemis were never represented in connection with the group at all. This, indeed, might be shown conclusively from the attitudes of the principal figures in the group itself.

The moment chosen by the artist is the most suggestive and artistic possible. A moment earlier, and the terror, which is the moving power in the group, has not seized all its members and imparted unity; a moment later, Niobe stands alone surrounded by her dead—a scene which to Greek feeling was, and to ours ought to be, repulsive. As it is, all is yet life and motion. We see at once the beauty and the glory that have been, and the disgrace and ruin that are about to be. The whole past and the whole future are grasped together for us in one sublime moment. Just as, when a fire has broken out in a magnificent building, we see in the brilliant flames, at the moment when they have laid such hold upon it as to convince us that all rescue is impossible, at once the magnificence that has been and the charred desolation that is about to be, so it is in the Niobe Group. In the light of the universal terror, we behold all that has been and all that will be, so artistically is the moment chosen.

All the children are hurrying toward their mother, the common source of all their trouble—her transgression returns to her in visible form. Nevertheless their looks are turned in various directions as if in search of the cause of their danger. Not one of them knows its true source; only Niobe herself, who looks toward heaven. In the face of every one of the children there is expressed the utmost surprise and consciousness of innocence. They are the unoffending sufferers for their mother's guilt, the possibility of which as yet flows only unconsciously in their blood.

On the extreme right we have a young son, marked Q, already stretched lifeless on the ground. He is entirely naked, his chlamys being spread out under him. His right hand and his eyes are still turned in death toward his mother, while his left hand rests on his bosom, on the spot transfixed by the arrow. His feet are crossed, and his legs partly drawn up in the attitude of the last agony. His end, however, has hardly been a painful one. There is no sign of contortion. The death that comes from the gods is mild and gentle, and it is those whom they love that die young.* In

* As already remarked, there exist three copies of this figure, the best of which stands in the middle of the *Niobiden-Saal* in the *Glyptothek* at Munich.

the death of her children, Niobe alone shall be punished, not they; for they are guiltless.

On the extreme left is a second son (A), first recognized as such by Thorwaldsen, kneeling, in the act of sinking to the ground. His left hand has dropped his mantle, now falling to the ground, and is directed toward the just inflicted wound in his back. His right, like that of the younger son of Laokoön, grasps his hair—an involuntary action in extreme pain. He is past all hope, almost past struggling even. His knees are placed as far apart as possible to delay the moment when he shall be stretched lifeless; but we see that all is vain.*

Turning again to the right, we find a third son (P), one step farther from death than the last mentioned. He is already mortally wounded, but not past struggling. He kneels with the main weight of his body upon his left knee, and tries to support himself against a rock. His left hand is pressed with such nervous force against the rock as considerably to force up the shoulder above it. To prevent himself from falling in the other direction, he has stemmed the heel of his right foot against the ground, while the upper part of the body is further supported by the right hand placed against the thigh. The nervously contracted toes of the right foot, the clenching of the right hand, and the head sinking in spite of all effort, show that death is just and only just gaining the mastery. In some respects this is one of the finest figures in the group. Here is death struggling with life on almost equal terms. Though death conquers, we see what fulness of life there must have been to die so, and what reason Niobe had to be proud of her children.†

Casting our eyes again to the left, we observe a female

This is one of the loveliest figures that ever human eye rested upon. The Florentine copy (the one found with the group in 1583), as well as the Dresden one, is said to be much inferior.

* It will be seen from the cut that I have assumed the present restoration of this figure, in which the right arm is stretched directly upwards, to be wrong. It appears to me that the head, which is also new, should be thrown back instead of forward. The statue in its present condition looks to me extremely awkward. There seems to be a second copy of it in the Este Museum at Catajo.

† Of this statue, there is another copy in Florence, one in Rome, and one, unrestored, but showing considerable divergences, in Madrid.

figure (B)—a statue of embodied apprehension. She is, to some extent, a counterpart to P, but is not yet struck. Only through the wound of her brother (A) has she discovered from what direction danger is to be apprehended, and her whole figure is in an attitude of intense and painful expectation. The countenance and the palms of both hands are turned in the direction of the danger, while the body seems as if it would partly shrink together, partly sink into the ground, in order to shelter itself. The deadly arrow, which is so near, is reflected in every fold of her drapery. One moment more and she is struck.*

Turning to the right, we find a figure, O, to which there is a counterpart on the left, C. Both are in the highest state of trepidation. That on the right, with two deaths behind him, is left in no doubt as to what awaits him, so he dashes forward at full speed, heedless of aught save the near danger. In trying to mount a ledge of rock, he has slipped with his left foot, and, in his effort to restore his equilibrium, he stretches out his right arm almost in a direct line with his left leg, while his left hand, seeking support, involuntarily seizes the first thing within its reach, and that is his garment, which he grasps with full force. Another instant, and, notwithstanding all his youthful vigor, he will sink like a broken reed, and, after a brief struggle, will be at rest forever.†

The son marked C is not yet altogether conscious of his impending doom. With a brother (A) behind him, whose fate is not yet certain, and a sister (B), who displays only

* This figure, of which there exist three other more or less accurate copies, two in the Capitoline Museum and one in the Louvre, is by many archæologists considered to represent Psychê, and this view is countenanced by the fact that the copy in the Louvre and one of those in the Capitoline Museum show remains of wings. Notwithstanding this, there can be little doubt that the figure in Florence represents a Niobid, the original of which may have lent itself as a motive for a Psychê. It has been subjected to considerable restoration, one part of which is certainly incorrect. The right arm, instead of being stretched out at full length, should be bent at about a right angle, so as to bring the lower arm and hand much nearer the breast and perfect the expression of defenceless apprehension.

† There is a second copy of this figure in Florence, very much injured and with the head turned backwards. Both figures are evidently intended to be looked at either from the left side or from behind.

feminine apprehension, he is still undecided whether he shall go back or forward. His first impulse, on seeing his brother sink, appears to have been to make his escape; but he is now just in the act of turning round to see what is about to happen to his sister. Her attitude shows him that all is not well with her, and almost involuntarily he raises his mantle as if to return and shield her. Up to this point, the figures have represented persons whose trepidation has reached such a height that they think, so far as they think at all, only of self-preservation. Here, however, we have the first signs of what the French call *altruisme*—thought for others. It is, indeed, very slight; and perhaps the fact that the body is still supported on the forward foot, is intended to show us that the impulse to go back was only momentary, and that he will return to his original impulse the next instant.* From this point, however, self-preservation coupled with thought for others begins, and it goes on until it reaches its culmination in Niobe herself.

Next to the two last-mentioned figures, on the left and on the right, are two groups, D E, and M N, forming counterparts. In both, the instinct of self-preservation stands considerably in abeyance, and is replaced by anxious care for others. On the right, the *pædagogos*, easily distinguished by his slavish dress, coarse features, and ignoble build, from any of the race of Niobe, is trying to shield from evident danger the youngest son, who, in childish alarm, has run to him for protection. The beautiful young head, with its clustering curls, makes us think of Homer's description of the son of Hektôr. The eyes seem like bright stars of the morning, looking in wonder toward the brightening east, whose light is soon to eclipse them. His soft, full, childish flesh is yet unpierced. It would be revolting to picture such an innocent, bright being as suffering physical pain, or even as being in immediate danger. He is shielded by the *pædagogos*, who, like Niobe, looks toward heaven, as conscious of the cause of the terrible visitation. The latter has no royal mantle to shield his ward with; but his uplifted hand shows the natural impulse. He seems to fear no danger for himself, and

* Of this figure, which is of inferior workmanship, no second copy is known.

perhaps this was intended by the artist. He is not involved in the fate of Niobe.*

In the group on the left (D E), we have one of the sons of Niobe endeavoring, notwithstanding the danger in which he himself is placed, to lift up and shield his falling sister. This sister, who has wandered away from her mother, has just been struck with an arrow, and is sinking to the ground, without a writhe or contortion, like a broken flower. Her brother, supporting her with his left hand, and raising his mantle with his right, as if to protect her, looks anxiously into the far distance, and in the direction of his mother, as if he thought that the arrows in coming must have passed her.†

Passing from these groups, we find, on either side of the mother, two grown daughters, each bearing a strong resemblance to her, but wearing very different expressions. The first on the left, F, the most beautiful and graceful of all the figures in the group, has just been struck in the neck, and is carrying her right hand toward the wounded part. Still, she hastens on with firm and dauntless step, as if heedless of herself and thoughtful only of her suffering mother. There is something unspeakably attractive about this figure. There is not an ungraceful line in it: the drapery is rich and in-

* In the Florentine group, the pædagogos and the youngest son stand on separate pedestals and do not form a group. Of the son, there is in the Vatican a second copy, found in Ostia. In 1826, there was found at Soissons in France a copy of the pædagogos and his ward forming a group, and there is some hope that other members of the group may yet be found there. According to Stark, there is a bronze copy of the pædagogos in the Louvre, where the last-mentioned group now also stands. In all the marble copies, the head and left arm of the pædagogos, and the left hand of the son, are restored; and it seems quite evident that the restorations, so far as the pædagogos is concerned, are wrong. The face should be turned to the right, as in the Florentine example, but not so much upwards, and the arm should not be so far outstretched or raised. It is quite possible that the head placed on the shoulders of the pædagogos does not belong there at all, and that the figure originally had a bald head, as in the bronze copy. The head of the son in the Soissons group is restored, and wrongly, as is shown by the two other copies, in which the heads are antique.

† In the Florentine group the daughter is missing, but a projection a little above the left knee of the son shows that he formed part of a group. It was Canova who, in the early years of this century, recognized in a fragment in the Vatican a second copy of this statue, forming a group with a female figure, as represented in the accompanying cut.

stinct with motion; the head is almost as lovely as that of the Venus of Melos, the attitude is queenly, and the whole is one of the most gracious figures that ever were carved or dreamt of.*

The corresponding figure on the right (L) is one stage nearer destruction, as indeed nearly all the figures on the right are nearer destruction than the corresponding ones on the left. She is older than the other, and therefore has been struck with a heavier blow, whether we regard that blow as a physical or as a mental one. She seems to feel

"As if calamity had but begun;
As if the vanward clouds of evil days
Had spent their malice, and the sullen rear
Was with its stored thunder laboring up."

One might say that she is calamity personified. Her senses swim with amazement, but she has not power to move a step.†

On the immediate right and left of the mother are the two eldest daughters, G and K, both entirely conscious of what awaits them, but not taken by surprise. They betray neither haste nor confusion. The one on the left, with head slightly thrown back, is in the act of drawing her mantle up to cover her face, so that her mother may not see her dying agony. She is not wounded; but every fold of the drapery

* There is in the Vatican a second copy, perhaps the original, of this statue, which, though mutilated and not restored, is one of the most glorious pieces of sculpture that have descended to us from antiquity. More than any other figure, it gives us a vivid idea of the excellence of the art of Skopas and Praxiteles. One has only to place it alongside the Florentine copy and to compare the two, especially in their drapery, to see how poor and weak were the Roman copyists compared with the Greek sculptors. What strength and massiveness in the folds of the garment, what vigor and haste in every muscle is displayed in the Vatican torso! The manner in which the folds of the mantle are disposed on the back, as well as the direction of what remains of the right arm, would lead us to the conclusion that this daughter, instead of bending back her right arm towards a wound in her neck, was stretching it out nearly in a line with the shoulder, and using it to raise her mantle, which for a moment the wind would inflate gracefully like a sail. In this case, we must imagine her as still unwounded, which supposition indeed comports, better than the other, with the living force manifested in every limb.

† This figure is held by Overbeck and Stark not to belong at all to the group. Friedrichs would retain it, and, I think, rightly. It has been claimed as a Melpomene, and Stark even thinks the body might have originally belonged to an Apollo Musagetes.

shows that her limbs, paralyzed with terror, are ready to sink under her. What drapery can be made to express is shown very vividly by a comparison between this figure and the one immediately behind it. The body, tremblingly supported, is thrown forward, and seems as if it would at any moment lose its equilibrium.* The figure on the right (K) seems to have recovered from surprise and consternation, to have regained self-possession, and to be in the act of preparing to shield some one. The unsupported robe on the right thigh shows that the right arm has been wrongly restored, and ought to be laying hold of the garment where the bunch of folds is. Whom else can she be preparing to protect but her younger brother, in whose direction she is looking, and who, in his hurried flight toward his mother, has, for a moment, found protection in the arms of the *pædagogos*, but in the next moment will continue his course? There is no room for him in the bosom of his mother; so his eldest sister, with the proud Niobe blood ripe in her veins, makes ready to receive and protect him. There is a striking similarity between this figure and that of Niobe herself, so much so that one critic has considered it to be a Niobe belonging to another group: to have grouped her with the youngest son would have rendered the similarity still greater, and thus have introduced an unartistic and unpleasant repetition into the scene. Everything is gained by the actual arrangement. The group of the *pædagogos* and youngest son balances the very dissimilar group on the right, and yet the warmth of affection which in a family usually exists between the eldest sister and the youngest brother is powerfully brought out. Besides this, a wonderful sense of movement is added to the group. We feel that, in the next moment, the child will have reached the shelter of his sister's royal mantle. Her downward-directed look shows that he must ascend to come to her, that she is on higher ground than he, and thus confirms our notion that the awful tragedy is represented as taking place on the summit of a rocky eminence, on the highest point of which stands Niobe, true to her origin in the nature-myth.

* There are two copies of the head of this figure in Berlin, one of them of Greek marble.

